



“Rousers of the Rabble” in the New Mexico Land Grant War: *La Alianza Federal De Mercedes* and the Violence of the State

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Abstract: This paper examines the patterns of state-sponsored and state-tolerated violence directed at a social movement organization in New Mexico known as *La Alianza Federal de Mercedes* during the 1960s and 1970s. Beginning in the 1960s, Alianza mobilized a broad-based movement of Chicano activists and Hispano land grant communities to advocate the return of lands they claimed had been stolen following the Mexican American War of 1846–1848. As a result, its leaders and many of its members became targets of law enforcement surveillance programs and counterintelligence operations. In this paper I examine the patterns of surveillance and physical violence directed at Alianza members. Confronted by Alianza’s challenge to racial inequality and economic injustice, the state construed Alianza as a generalized, and racialized, threat to social order that required in response the use of coercive control and physical violence.

Keywords: New Mexico, *Alianza Federal de Mercedes*, violence, territoriality, the state

Introduction

On 5 June 1967, 19 men and one woman, armed with semi-automatic assault weapons, high-caliber hunting rifles and sticks of dynamite, descended on the Rio Arriba County courthouse in the small northern New Mexican town of Tierra Amarilla. The armed raiders were all members of *La Alianza Federal de Mercedes* (Federal Alliance of Land Grants), a New Mexico-based Hispano social movement organization that advocated the return of Spanish and Mexican land grants that were lost to legitimate heirs following the Mexican American War. The June raid was the culmination of increased conflict between Alianza members and law enforcement agencies. Alianza raided the courthouse in pursuit of District Attorney Alfonso Sanchez, who had harassed and arrested many Alianza leaders throughout May and early June in an effort to disrupt Alianza organizing efforts and meetings. When Alianza members stormed the courthouse searching for Sanchez, a

gun battle ensued that left one New Mexico state police officer and the county jailer shot and wounded. Salazar, however, was not in the courthouse that afternoon. In their escape, the raiders took two hostages and fled into the rugged mountains surrounding Tierra Amarilla. New Mexico's Governor called out local Army Guard units, armed with tanks and artillery, to hunt down the *Alianzistas*. Most of the raiders were eventually apprehended but not until the raid had become international news.

By the time of the courthouse raid, Alianza had become an important organization in New Mexico, advocating the return of lands they claimed had been stolen following the Mexican American War of 1846–1848. Throughout the Spanish (1598–1821) and Mexican (1821–1848) period of control in New Mexico, community land grants were dispersed to settlers willing to establish communities on the far northern frontier. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war, guaranteed legal recognition to land claims by the settlers and heirs of those grants. Despite treaty-bound assurances, hundreds of land grants were lost though legal fraud, administrative mismanagement and commercial speculation (Ebright 1994). Northern New Mexico was the center of this land loss and has become, as a result, the site of over 150 years of resistance.

During the late nineteenth century, a covert group known as *Las Gorras Blancas* (The White Caps) cut fences and destroyed property in an effort to thwart the large-scale efforts of commercial grazing interests (Arellano 2000; Rosenbaum 1981). During the early twentieth century *La Mano Negra* (The Black Hand) burned hay bales and painted ominous black hands on barns in a campaign to intimidate non-heirs buying up the Spanish and Mexican land grants in the region (Torrez 1994). In the years immediately preceding Alianza, a group known as the Abiquiu Corporation mailed eviction notices to Anglo owners of Spanish and Mexican land grants, patrolled the boundaries of the Tierra Amarilla land grant with armed sentries and filed lawsuits seeking the return of lands lost in the nineteenth century. Alianza continued the struggle, and the courthouse raid pushed the issue into the national consciousness (Gardner 1971; Nabokov 1969). Reies Lopez Tijerina, the charismatic founder of Alianza, became an important regional and national Chicano leader.

The group, their leader, and 5 June are of significant historical and contemporary importance in New Mexico; indeed it is not an exaggeration to suggest that, aside from New Mexico's statehood in 1912, the courthouse raid was the most significant historical event in New Mexico in the twentieth century. Prior to Alianza, the history of fraud in land grant adjudication was largely unknown. Since the raid, a large volume of historical research has documented the social and economic consequences of resource expropriation (Dunbar-Ortiz

2007; Gonzalez 2003; Sunseri 1979), the history of land grant chicanery (Ebright 1993), and the social histories of Hispanos in northern New Mexico (Deutsch 1987; Forrest 1989). In addition, a number of studies have sought to understand the courthouse raid (Gardner 1971; Nabokov 1969) and the role and character of Tijerina (Busto 2006). When discussing the significance of Alianza, however, the focus is often on the violent courthouse raid. Less well known is the history of education reform advocacy begun by the organization, or Tijerina's civil rights activism. Less well known still are the patterns of state violence and repression and the secret history of covert action against Alianza by the FBI and the New Mexico state police. That secret history is the focus of this paper. Throughout the 1960s, the FBI and the New Mexico state police carried out covert intelligence programs against Tijerina and Alianza. Following the courthouse raid, these programs expanded to include counterinsurgency operations against the group and its members. Alianza offices were bombed, members were attacked, and Tijerina's family was terrorized. Although Alianza succeeded in finally shining a bright light on land grant injustices, it did so at the expense of its member's personal safety and security.

In this paper, I argue that the use of violence against Alianza was not unique but rather reflected a politics of territoriality used by the state in racialized struggles for social and spatial control. In this framework, violence served to advance a strategy of racialized territoriality in which, through the politics of race and the control of territory, the state sought to reinforce existing socio-spatial inequalities for Hispanos in New Mexico. As Alianza challenged these socio-spatial arrangements, agencies of social control responded with physical violence. The FBI aggressively applied their covert Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) to destroy the political effectiveness of Alianza. The New Mexico state police, with a number of officers implicated in a pattern of bombings against Tijerina, harassed Alianza with frequent arrests on trumped up charges and entirely ignored violence directed at the organization.

I draw from a number of archival sources in reconstructing this history of state surveillance and repression of Alianza. The first is the FBI file on Alianza that Tijerina acquired in the 1970s and 1980s through numerous Freedom of Information Act requests. Tijerina's archive includes hundreds of declassified FBI documents covering over a decade of surveillance. Tijerina donated this archive and other files to the Center for Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. I also accessed additional archival collections at the Center for Southwest Research and the New Mexico State Records Center and Archive in Santa Fe. In addition, by accessing the archives of the 1975 US Senate Church Committee, I have placed the repression of Alianza in the political context of state-sponsored repression of 1960s civil rights

movements. The Church Committee investigated the illegal patterns of surveillance undertaken by US intelligence agencies against domestic targets throughout the 1960s. A huge archive of declassified memoranda, reports, charts and analyses documents the patterns of state violence and repression against organizations the FBI deemed “subversive”.

I begin this paper with a discussion of race, territoriality and violence in the context of the New Mexico land grant movement. This section situates the New Mexico land grant war within a context that more generally describes the uses of violence in the territorial expression of state power. I then examine, through an analysis of COINTELPRO and the New Mexico state police anti-Alianza efforts, the uses of violence and the patterns of repression by the state to keep the group “in their place”.

The Violent Politics of Racialized Territoriality in New Mexico

The concept of racialized territoriality provides a lens through which to examine struggles over land and resources in New Mexico. Confronted by Alianza’s challenge to racial inequality and economic injustice, the state construed Alianza as a generalized, and racialized, threat to social order that required in response the use of coercive control and physical violence. The state’s discourse of a racialized threat and the use of physical violence against this “threat” serves as a starting point to understand the conflicts between Alianza activists and the largely Anglo-controlled federal and state institutions of social control in New Mexico.

As Delaney (2002:7) suggested, “race—in all of its complexity and ambiguity, as ideology and identity—is what it is and does what it does precisely because of how it is given spatial expression”. The spatial expression of race in New Mexico includes these dimensions of ideology and identity, both in the way the state sought to establish and maintain territorial control and the rhetoric and tactics of resistance by Alianza. One common strategy of COINTELPRO, for example, was to paint Chicano civil rights leaders as communists. Tijerina understood redbaiting as a rhetorical ploy of the state to produce the necessary conditions for violence against certain targets:

Anglos had preached this anti-Communist gospel for more than the last twenty years. They had the community conditioned and regimented against ‘Communism.’ To say that someone is a communist is the easiest way to kill or destroy that person. I understood how serious their conspiracy to kill me was. Who, in this conditioned community, was going to be angry if they killed a Communist while escaping? (Tijerina 2000:23).

The politics that played out from coding certain spaces according to race in New Mexico can partly be understood through what Wilmsen (2007) calls New Mexico’s “environmental–racial order” in which legitimacy over control of land, and therefore resources, is made manifest through a politics of racial triangulation in which Hispanos, Native Americans, and Anglos make “claims, counterclaims, and counter-counterclaims about environmental problems in northern New Mexico. In so doing they variously draw on, reinforce, and challenge the valuing of themselves relative to one another along axes of environmental stewardship and victimization” (Wilmsen 2007:238). Such a triangulation produces, contests, and reinforces inclusions and exclusions for certain groups from making legitimized claims to land.

Space is only implicit in Wilmsen’s formulation, however, in the sense that how this triangulation plays out determines access to and control over land and resources. To understand the spatialized context of race and racism in New Mexico, I use the concept of territoriality to more explicitly describe the active making of racialized spaces in New Mexico. Territoriality, Cox suggested, draws attention to “a focus on exclusion, inclusion, internal restructuring, and subsequent competitions and conflicts around the content of [an area]” (Cox 2003:608). In this sense, racialized territoriality is a concept used to reflect the space-making dimension of the identity-based claims and counterclaims described by Wilmsen. The political geographies of territoriality, as Tyner suggests, “bring together the ideas of power and space: territories as spaces that are defended, contested, claimed against the claims of others through territoriality” (Tyner 2006:107).

Skirmishes over New Mexico’s land grants have been, and remain, battles to legitimize claims of authority in control of territory. Throughout the 1960s, Alianza developed an oppositional politics of racialized territoriality “from below” in their efforts to right the wrongs of land grant adjudication in nineteenth century New Mexico. Alianza merged claims to land (both *de jure* and *de facto*) with new and spatialized cultural and ethnic identities in efforts to challenge the dominant (Anglo) territoriality of state power and authority in New Mexico. Chicano leaders in the American Southwest adopted the term *La Raza* as a self-designation that fused race, space and culture (Barrera 1979). Alianza’s use of the term *Indo-Hispano* described a shared history of culture and oppression in New Mexico that tied together the cultural and resource struggles of Chicano and indigenous communities. In this sense, Alianza organized in opposition to the institutionalized racism that, they argued, robbed Hispanos of their land and culture.

It was not difficult for Alianza to make compelling arguments to land grant heirs in New Mexico. The state had long deployed exclusionary, racialized categories of citizenship in the American Southwest. In 1939, for example, the Governor of Colorado closed the border to

“alien” agricultural workers from New Mexico in an effort to restrict Hispano movements and control labor (Deutsch 1987:99). Similarly, the United States Forest Service frequently reinforced territorial jurisdiction over former Spanish and Mexican land grants through plans, policies and procedures predicated on the perceived cultural and racial shortcomings of Spanish-speaking New Mexicans (Correia 2007). Indeed, the territorial expansion that turned the Mexican North into the American Southwest relied on a racialized geopolitics of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism and paternalism that rationalized the violence of the state in the control of territory (White 1991).

Alianza formulated a challenge to state territoriality that sought to reserve for Indo-Hispanos the legal and cultural legitimacy necessary to make land claims. The legal challenge was based first and foremost on Alianza’s analysis of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Tijerina charged that the USA abrogated its Treaty responsibilities in adjudicating land claims. He sought to do this by grounding Hispano land claims in international law—previous efforts to use the courts had failed (Ebright 1993). Legal arguments were made all the more compelling when coupled with popular protests that linked Hispano identity to land while describing the USA as a territorial aggressor. At rallies and in press releases, for example, Alianzistas carried signs and distributed handbills that read, “The USA is Trespassing in New Mexico” (Figure 1).

Alianza’s legal arguments over land grants, combined with their cultural nationalist rhetoric of *Aztlan*,¹ linked land claims to cultural and racial histories of injustice. As Tijerina wrote in his memoirs, the

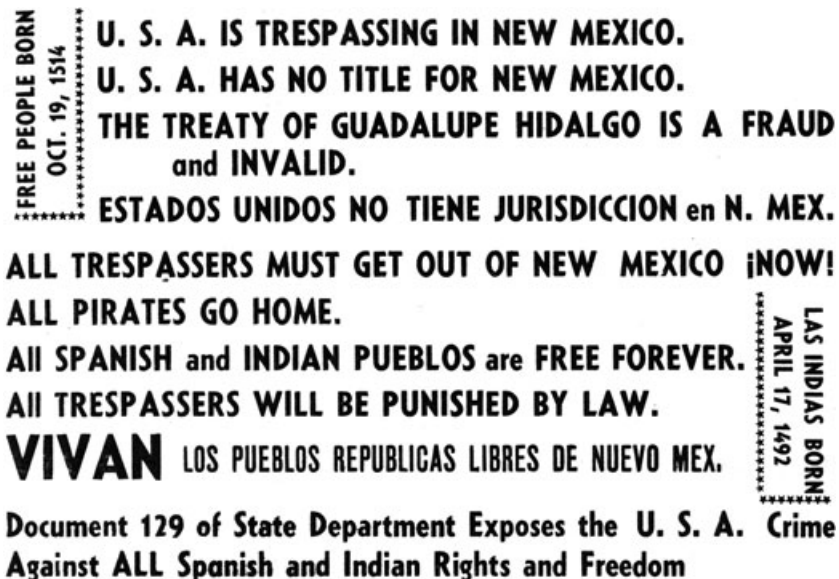


Figure 1: Alianza handbill (source: Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 7)

claims of Hispanos in New Mexico were based on the existence of a new *Mestizo* race in New Mexico that emerged from the collision between Spain and the region's indigenous peoples. For Tijerina (2000:35) *Indo-Hispanos* were a new race “born when the East and the West were joined”. This Indo-Hispano cultural politics, often put into spatial form as the Hispano *homeland* in the geographic literature on New Mexico (Carlson 1990; Meinig 1973; Nostrand 1992), has become a general, and still potent, political approach for land grant activists in New Mexico. More recent analyses stress the politics of territoriality as an ongoing process or struggle. As Kosek (2006:58) described, Indo-Hispano identity formation in New Mexico reflects a racial politics of land and identity claims “forged, remembered, and remade in contemporary social contexts, political struggles, and daily practices”. This history received scant attention, however, even following the raid. In the immediate aftermath of the courthouse raid, the *New York Times* dismissed the concerns of Hispanos in northern New Mexico by referring to the region as “Appalachia with a language problem” (Gardner 1971:184). Despite the dismissals, Alianza developed a huge constituency in northern New Mexico in the late 1960s and became, as a result, a central target of the agencies of social control in the region (particularly the FBI and the New Mexico state police) as the state struggled to control this inscrutable Chicano organization and its seemingly outrageous claims.

I have used the words “struggle”, “skirmishes” and “battles”, and these are not merely useful metaphors. Violence has been at the very center of the politics of racialized territoriality in New Mexico. From the Spanish conquistadors through the Pueblo revolt and Indian Wars to the 1846 invasion of Mexico by the United States, violence has shaped the contours of territorial control in New Mexico and has been a key strategy of the state in maintaining a racialized spatial order. Despite this long history of state violence in New Mexico, many analyses and histories of Alianza have been efforts to understand why Alianza acted violently against the state. The violence I examine in this paper, however, is not the violence of the courthouse raid, but rather the forms and practices of state-sponsored or state-tolerated violence directed at Alianza.

State-sponsored violence has a long history in the United States as a tactic to maintain social control. As King (1999:2) pointed out:

[s]tate-sponsored violence has kept people “in their place.” The American government has made use of violence—or the threat of state violence—to enforce the legal apparatus of slavery, the exclusive access to higher education of white men, and the disenfranchisement of women and people of color.

Violence, in the way King uses it, implies a general condition of the state in its use of physical force in social control. In contrast, Keane viewed

state coercive authority and violence as a “pragmatic” reaction of the state to social unrest. In other words, when social problems, defined as such by the state, become conflated as problems of human nature the solution becomes the application of force. “That flat-headed pragmatism often feeds other beliefs, including the presumption that ‘human nature’ is prone to violence, and that that is why—inevitably—an armed body like the state should monopolise its means, without further questions” (Keane 2004:7). Violence serves the need of the state for social and spatial control, particularly when an established social order begins to unravel in the face of dissent and social unrest. Violence, in this sense, is a strategy of the agencies of social control, such as the police, to maintain territorial control in the face of targets or threats. De Certeau (1988:xix, 36) called this a “calculus of force-relationships” whereby a powerful actor, like the state, can define its spatial and social authority in a certain place and identify threats and targets that need to be “managed”.

As this case study of state repression of Alianza makes clear, the agencies of social control in New Mexico relied on covert, and frequently violent, strategies to re-establish territorial control in the wake of Alianza success in organizing and advocating for the rights of dispossessed land grant heirs. While direct and indirect violence has been a central tool in the control of Hispanos in northern New Mexico, violence increased when Alianza began to attract attention to their cause. Alianza produced social upheaval in its demand for the return of land to the heirs of Mexican and Spanish land grants. In return, the state literally invaded Alianza, attacking them not only where they protested but also where they slept, lived and worked. In his memoirs, Tijerina (2000:25) described sleeping at night “among the weeds and trees far away from the house” as a way to avoid the frequent arrests and home invasions by law enforcement. These patterns became a part of the bureaucratic calculus of the FBI and the New Mexico state police in their pursuit of territorial control. The state responded to Alianza’s analysis of racial inequality and economic justice activism with increasingly coercive action. Coercion and physical violence became a legitimized strategy of the state when dissent became a threat to the social order and race became a marker of this threat. This is illustrated in a memo dated 28 August 1964 from FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to all FBI Special Agents in Charge (SAC), when he declared that “[t]here are clear and unmistakable signs that we are in the midst of a social revolution with the racial movement at its core. The Bureau, in meeting its responsibilities in this area, is an integral part of this revolution”²

In a State of Violence: The New Mexico Land Grant War

My only weapons were spiritual, moral and cultural. These weapons are slower than the Anglo ones (Reies Lopez Tijerina 2000:117).

COINTELPRO

The letter from Hoover to FBI field offices excerpted above reflected a wide-ranging covert program against dissent run by the FBI from 1956 until the early 1970s. Under the name COINTELPRO, the FBI conducted a sweeping counterintelligence program against social movement organizations. According to congressional investigators during the Church Committee hearings, the program “was designed to ‘disrupt’ groups and ‘neutralize’ individuals deemed to be threats to domestic security. The FBI resorted to counterintelligence tactics in part because its chief officials believed that the existing law could not control the activities of certain dissident groups”.³ Organizations such as the Communist Party USA, new left groups such as Students for a Democratic Society and a variety of civil rights organizations came under intense FBI scrutiny.⁴ Civil rights organizations particularly became a focus of FBI interest. FBI field offices responded with extensive programs designed to provoke violence. In September of 1969, for example, the San Diego SAC reported that “Shootings, beatings and a high degree of unrest continues to prevail in the ghetto area of Southeast San Diego. Although no specific counterintelligence action can be credited with contributing to this overall situation, it is felt that a substantial amount of the unrest is directly attributable to [COINTELPRO]”.⁵

Throughout the 15-year period of COINTELPRO activities, FBI field agents selected targets according to a set of frameworks that began with an interest in identifying communists and organizations influenced by communist ideology. Later this frame expanded to include race as a factor in determinations of subversiveness. In the late 1960s race became a central element in the way the FBI defined “subversion”. As Cunningham and Browning (2004:359) pointed out “[w]ithin the unique organizational context of the FBI, race effectively became a highly salient proxy for subversion”.

This can be seen in the development of specific vehicles to track and harass civil rights leaders. In 1964, the FBI established COMINFIL a special program in the Domestic Intelligence Division, charged with identifying communist influences on racial issues as defined by the FBI. Much of the FBI interest in Alianza fell under the COMINFIL program. In August 1967, Hoover began the COMINFIL database. He ordered agents to intensify collection of intelligence on civil rights leaders he considered “vociferous rabble-rousers”. He directed that “an index be compiled of racial agitators and individuals who have demonstrated a potential for fomenting racial discord. It is desired that only individuals of prominence who are of national interest be included in this index”.⁶ FBI interest and activities against Tijerina fell under COMINFIL, and later, the Rabble Rouser Index.

The Rabble Rouser Index was of central importance in COMINFIL and COINTELPRO. Rabble Rouser status was designed to coordinate counter-intelligence actions against prime targets: “to disrupt groups and discredit individuals”.⁷ The index intensified surveillance and required field agents to suggest specific plans of action against subjects. Elevation to the index meant that individuals became targets for active covert campaigns to discredit and destroy. Hoover, in fact, directed field offices to develop wide-ranging and detailed plans of action against Rabble Rouser targets. Common tactics identified in FBI memos were, for example, to “instigate personal conflicts or animosities” within organizations; create “impressions that certain leaders [were] informants for the Bureau or other law enforcement agencies”; and establish intense surveillance programs designed to harass leaders with constant arrests on trumped up charges and minor infractions.⁸ In March 1968, the Rabble Rouser Index was renamed the Agitator Index. With the change came a requirement for photographic surveillance of all indexed “agitators”. In October 1968, all FBI field agents were instructed to recommend additional persons for the program and to “consider if the individual was rendered ineffective would it curtail such [disruptive] activity in his area of influence”.⁹ By early 1969, 55 domestic targets were indexed in the FBI’s various Key Activist Programs.¹⁰ The FBI established standardized forms with checkboxes for agents to indicate the membership affiliations of targets. The following “organizations” were identified on the form:¹¹ American Nazi Party, Anti-Vietnam, Black Nationalist, Black Panther Party, Communist, Congress of Racial Equality, Ku Klux Klan, Latin American, Minuteman, Nation of Islam, National States Rights Party, Progressive Labor Party, Nationalist groups advocating Independence for Puerto Rico, Revolutionary Action Movement, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Students for a Democratic Society, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Socialist Workers Party, Workers World Party, Miscellaneous.

“Disrupting and Destroying”: FBI Targeting of Alianza

You should carefully evaluate the activities of each and every participant in AFDM [Alianza Federal de Mercedes] demonstrations in the past to ascertain if they can be categorized as rousers of the rabble (J. Edgar Hoover¹²).

We ask for justice and get powdered milk instead (Reies Lopez Tijerina¹³).

In January 1964, the San Diego FBI field office linked an organization called the *Comite Pro-Mercedes por la Corona Espanol* to the Communist Party of Mexico. Hoover directed field agents in Chicago, Phoenix, Albuquerque and San Diego to investigate the organization

and its possible communist ties.¹⁴ Nothing appears to have come of these investigations except to have drawn FBI interest to Alianza, which had formed on 2 February 1963, the 115th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In July 1964, Reies Tijerina's brother, Cristobal, walked into the Albuquerque FBI field office and invited agents to attend the first annual Alianza convention to be held in Albuquerque. Cristobal was told that an agent could not attend the convention.¹⁵ Despite the indifference shown to Cristobal's offer, the FBI had been monitoring Alianza. Months earlier, in February 1964, Hoover directed the Albuquerque office to begin a “wide-ranging investigation seeking information to determine whether to recommend an ongoing surveillance investigation [against Alianza]”.¹⁶ The FBI claimed to have an Alianza source “of continuing value, the unauthorized disclosure of which could adversely affect the national defense”.¹⁷

In an April 1964 memo, Hoover directed local agents to “determine if Alianza is controlled by *Frente Internacional de Humanos Derechos* (International Front for Human Rights), and, if this is the case, there is a possibility of a violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act”.¹⁸ A month later, Hoover directed field agents, to “determine if [Alianza] has any connection with the Movement for the Territorial Reintegration of Mexico (MRTM) or is being controlled by the MRTM. This matter should be pressed vigorously to develop fully activities of subject group as well as activities of Lopez and any other affiliated organizations to determine if a subject's activities are in violation of the Registration Act or other US statutes within the Bureau's jurisdiction”.¹⁹

The interest in Alianza's connections to radical Mexican organizations reflected the Bureau's focus on communist influences in new left social movements. With Alianza, the FBI assumed links could be found that would establish Alianza as a separatist organization serving the interests of any of a number of radical Mexican organizations. Efforts to prove this connection occupied nearly 10 years of effort on the part of FBI agents. During this period, the Bureau monitored the movements of Tijerina and the activities of Alianza through a number of methods: the monitoring of Alianza media coverage, undercover reports by FBI field agents, the use of undercover infiltrators, informants, and constant surveillance of Alianza's Albuquerque office. By late 1964, the FBI concluded that none of these sources provided evidence of any illegal activities or connection whatsoever between Alianza and any Mexican organization.²⁰ Despite memos to that effect coming out of the Albuquerque field office, Hoover briefed the Central Intelligence Agency, military intelligence and Department of Justice agents in 1966 on communist influences in Alianza.²¹ FBI surveillance activities continued through 1967, however, despite additional memos concluding that all investigations “fail[ed] to fully indicate a nationalistic tendency favoring Mexico on the part of AFDM [Alianza]”.²²

New Mexico law enforcement agencies began to establish parallel surveillance programs in late 1966 and early 1967. In 1966 Alianza organized a protest in which members physically claimed a portion of the Carson National Forest in northern New Mexico as the rightful property of the San Joaquin del Rio Chama Land Grant. The dramatic three-day occupation publicized the land grant organizing and advocacy efforts of Alianza and infuriated local law enforcement officials in Rio Arriba County. Through the fall and winter of 1966 and 1967, District Attorney Alfonso Sanchez cracked down on Alianza organizing efforts with roadblocks, rural checkpoints and frequent arrests. In the face of these efforts, Alianza called for the occupation of another land grant, this time the Tierra Amarilla land grant. Throughout the early 1960s, the Abiquiu Corporation had filed lawsuits seeking the return of Tierra Amarilla, one of the most notorious land grant thefts during land grant adjudication in New Mexico (Ebright 1993). Much of the active core of Alianza's northern membership in 1967 was made up of former Abiquiu Corporation members. In the spring of 1967, Alianza announced that they would occupy the more than 500,000-acre Tierra Amarilla land grant. The occupation would include roadblocks in which heirs would extract port-of-entry fees from all non-heirs. Furious political efforts by Governor David Cargo to forestall the planned occupation fell apart when Sanchez ordered the preemptory arrests of Alianza members. On 2 June 1967, days before the courthouse raid, Sanchez ordered a series of late night raids of the homes of Alianza members and sympathizers. The police made nearly a dozen arrests on unlawful assembly charges, though each member arrested was alone at the time. While Reies escaped the dragnet, his brother Cristobal did not. During the arrest of Cristobal, New Mexico state police confiscated file cabinets with names and addresses of all Alianza members. In addition, a number of documents were found including some related to Che Guevara and guerilla tactics. Sanchez claimed these documents proved Alianza's communist leanings. Internal documents show that the FBI knew these claims to be false. The Democrat Sanchez and Republican Governor Cargo had feuded over Alianza throughout 1966 and 1967. Cargo had parlayed rural discontent for the Democratic patronage machine in Rio Arriba into a surprising electoral victory for himself. He had frequently met with Tijerina and Alianza members in the Governor's mansion. Hoover wrote to Albuquerque field agents that "news media and other data furnished by your office indicate the possibility current activities of subject group may be used by Sanchez in a political dispute with the governor of New Mexico criticizing prior handling of organization".²³

The courthouse raid three days later elevated Tijerina's "subversive" status within the FBI. In a November 1967 memo Hoover ordered agents to evaluate Tijerina's inclusion on the Rabble Rouser Index.²⁴ FBI intelligence gathering expanded in October 1967 to include

Figure 2: Entry for Reies Tijerina in the Rabble Rouser Index (source: Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 7)

constant surveillance of Alianza's Albuquerque headquarters.²⁵ On 16 February 1968, Tijerina was officially listed on the Rabble Rouser Index (Figure 2).²⁶

Alianza after Tierra Amarilla

The courthouse raid catapulted Tijerina into national prominence, established Alianza as a potent political force in rural northern New

Mexico and drew intense FBI interest in the organization. Despite increased political pressure and criminal investigations of Alianza following the raid, the organization used its increased prominence in New Mexico to expand its influence beyond rural land grant issues. Alianza increased urban organizing efforts and focused attention on the social and political issues underlying poverty and land loss for Hispanics in New Mexico.

Beginning in early 1968, Alianza publicized a series of education reform measures for the Albuquerque public schools. Through press releases, circulars, pamphlets, direct action, and a number of lawsuits, Alianza advocated a complete overhaul of a system they described as “intentionally ruining the lives of hundreds of thousands of Indo-Hispano, Black and Indian kids”.²⁷ These efforts covered a variety of topics from individual critiques of various school curricula to broad analyses of education policy. In the late 1960s, for example, Alianza distributed a leaflet throughout the school system criticizing the history textbooks used in the district. They mocked the celebratory tone of Manifest Destiny threaded throughout the books and argued that the texts offered “a very prejudiced view of history designed to make the Gringo look good and the Chicano like a stupid, dirty, lazy bum, and to justify the US aggression against Mexico. This book destroys the very history and mind of the Chicano child”.²⁸ More programmatic critiques and substantive proposals followed. In June 1969, Alianza produced a draft proposal, presented to the Board of Education, demanding sweeping educational reform measures for the district. The proposal suggested that Spanish only instruction should be offered in some schools with Spanish language fluency required of all employees. They suggested a policy to require history taught from the perspective of Spain or Mexico, instead of only the United States. They demanded community control of individual schools and an end to curricular structures that overwhelmingly excluded Chicano children from college prep courses. They argued that the school should “either teach poor, Indo-Hispano children or get out the business of teaching and allow other agencies that truly believe in the welfare of these children to do the job”. They advocated an increase in the teaching of Spanish literature and art. They concluded by demanding that the district “guarantee in no uncertain terms student rights of all types, including freedom to organize, speak, distribute literature, assemble and protest. These rights are particularly important to Indo-Hispano students”.²⁹

In addition to urban organizing in New Mexico, Tijerina embarked on a national speaking tour in the fall of 1967 designed to link Indo-Hispano issues to the larger civil rights movement. In September, Tijerina met with Elijah Muhammad in Chicago. He traveled to Austin, Texas to make an appearance at a rally in support of farm workers. He followed this up with a series of appearances in southern California, making speeches

and meeting with civil rights organizations. At Tijerina's invitation, a number of Black Panthers and members of the Southern Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, including Stokely Carmichael, attended the Alianza convention in Albuquerque. His speeches throughout this period frequently attacked the structures of power in New Mexico and attributed the social problems confronting Indo-Hispanos to racism. His rhetoric alarmed the FBI. An undercover FBI agent attended a Tijerina speech in El Paso, Texas and described it as of the “Rabbleroising variety”, writing to Hoover that it reminded him of speeches “given by Mussolini and Hitler”.³⁰ Tijerina met with Corky Gonzalez and gave a speech at a meeting celebrating the first anniversary of Gonzalez's Chicano civil rights group *Cruzada por Justicia* (Crusade for Justice). In his speech he declared that Alianza would take the land grant issue to the United Nations looking for justice (Vigil 1999:41). In February 1968 Tijerina appeared with Stokely Carmichael at a Black Panther “Free Huey” rally in Oakland, California. With an undercover FBI agent in the crowd recording his speech, Tijerina said, “Oh, I don't hate the white man. No, of course not. I'm not going to be violent against him. All I'm going to do if I'm sleeping and he breaks down my door, I'm going to shoot him between the eyes and I'm going to keep on sleeping. Oh, he wants to make you believe that I'll go after them, no, no, no. I trap them like a spider. Come over here”.³¹

“A Campaign of Terror”: Physical Violence against Alianza after the Courthouse Raid

Shortly after Tijerina's appearance with Carmichael, the Baltimore FBI office reported through sources they believed reliable that Tijerina had received numerous death threats from the American Nazi party and the John Birch Society.³² Throughout 1967, the Birch Society magazine, *The American Opinion*, had published rabid anti-Alianza opinion pieces on Tijerina passed off as research reports. In one article authored by Alan Stang titled “Reies Tijerina: The Communist plot to grab the southwest”, the author dismissed Tijerina's land claims as unfounded and the rantings of a “terrorist”. The article included a picture of Tijerina above a caption that read, “Marxist Reies Tijerina is guerilla leader”. Stang compared Alianza to the Vietcong and described Alianza tactics as “standard Communist operating procedure”.³³ Hoover sent a copy of Stang's article to SAC Albuquerque and directed the office to prepare a brief on Alianza for the Office of Economic Opportunity based on the article. In the order, Hoover directed SAC to “[c]onduct no active investigation”. The brief was to be based entirely on the opinions of the John Birch Society.³⁴

In late 1968, with Alianza's prominence in local and statewide politics established and Tijerina's stature in the civil rights movement growing,

Tijerina went to trial for his role in the courthouse raid. During the month-long trial, Tijerina served as his own lawyer against a series of charges including kidnapping. Tijerina claimed he had the constitutional authority to make citizens' arrests of the law enforcement officers who had obstructed their right to free assembly. The prosecution was unprepared for Tijerina's defense and the broad public support he received. Tijerina was acquitted of all charges on 13 December 1968. By the end of 1968 Alianza had established rural and urban constituencies in New Mexico, fended off legal efforts to destroy its effectiveness, and integrated its goals into the national civil rights movement. And it was then that the bombings began.

In December 1968, Tijerina's ex-wife's house was bombed (Tijerina 2000:127). In January 1969, Alianza's headquarters was bombed. The following day, the local FBI field office wrote to Hoover arguing that "[b]ecause of [the] controversial nature of the organization and the pending prosecution in state court of several of its members, it is recommended that no investigation should be conducted".³⁵ Alianza member Thomas Gallegos' house was bombed on the same day. The following month, a ranch was firebombed and destroyed just hours after a sympathizer offered its use to Alianza.³⁶ In March 1969, a bomb destroyed Alianza member Santiago Anaya's car while he was at the Alianza offices. According to an FBI memo written two days later, parts of the automobile were found 100 feet from the car. The blast drove a hole through the pavement to a depth of more than 12 inches.³⁷

Tijerina and Alianza members held the New Mexico state police and the Albuquerque police department responsible for the bombings. "The police harassed our people daily during 1967 and 1968. In those days, paid police spies trying to learn our every step plagued the Alianza. They wanted to find flaws. They did not let us rest. The police were waging a campaign of terror against the Alianza" (Tijerina 2000:105). A memo from the FBI Albuquerque Field Office to the US Attorney in Albuquerque noted that: "following the confiscation of membership list of [Alianza] in the summer of 1967 by state authorities numerous members of [Alianza] have been harassed and bombings have occurred".³⁸

New Mexico state police surveillance occurred in addition to FBI operations, though there appears to have been little or no official communication between the two organizations. In the month prior to the courthouse raid, Detectives Freddie Martinez and Robert Romero, under orders from New Mexico State Police Colonel Joseph Black and District Attorney Sanchez, conducted surveillance activities and prepared intelligence briefs on Alianza. A March 1968 report indicates that authorities knew a former state trooper and federal marshal named Tiny Fellion was a paid assassin and demolitions expert and was operating out of Española, New Mexico.³⁹ Less than two months later,

Fellion blew off his left hand while placing an explosive device at Alianza headquarters in Albuquerque. The report on the explosion noted that Fellion was a member of the John Birch Society and was friendly with other Birch Society members in the New Mexico state police, various Sheriff’s departments in the state, the office of District Attorney Sanchez and the office of State Attorney General Boston Witt.⁴⁰

The violence escalated for Tijerina’s family. In June 1972, men posing as Chicano movement allies kidnapped Tijerina’s daughter Rosita (Rosita was the lone woman in the courthouse raid). She escaped her abductors by jumping out of a moving automobile. In March 1973, New Mexico state police officer Albert Vega kidnapped and sexually assaulted Tijerina’s son Noé. Vega had been assigned to protect Tijerina’s family during legal proceedings.⁴¹ Throughout the 1970s, Tijerina and Alianza members wrote numerous press releases and letters to various government officials documenting the pattern of state violence. Wilfredo Sedillo, a long-time Alianza member, called Tijerina’s children “political prisoners” of the “F.B.I.s attempt to neutralize the Alianza land grant movement”.⁴² In one press release, Tijerina described the violence directed at his family:

My wife was violated by police. My daughter Rose was kidnapped by police. My son Noé was kidnapped and raped by police. My home and office were bombed four times by police . . . And why all this terror? What is the motive for all this terror? The State and Federal Government will stop at nothing to cover up the ruthless raping of all our municipalities that were created under the Governments of Spain and Mexico. The stealing of our property rights is the real motive behind all this terror. This is the reason for denying me and my wife our constitutional rights”.⁴³

Conclusion

I don’t hate the police. They carry guns, and it is not in my interest to make enemies of them. They are but the puppets of the rich and of the politicians that steal from our people (Reies Lopez Tijerina 2000:174).

COINTELPRO was classified information until 8 March 1971 when an organization calling itself the Citizen’s Committee to Investigate the FBI broke into a Media, Pennsylvania FBI field office. The group stole thousands of classified documents and mailed them to newspapers throughout the country. With the program exposed, the FBI suspended all COINTELPRO activities. In 1975 the Senate initiated a detailed investigation of COINTELPRO and other government intelligence activities that targeted citizens. The subsequent Church Committee Report concluded that the programs:

violated the law and fundamental human decency ... the Bureau went beyond the collection of intelligence to secret action defined to “disrupt” and “neutralize” target groups and individuals. COINTELPRO tactics ranged from the trivial (mailing reprints of Reader’s Digest articles to college administrators) to the degrading (sending anonymous poison-pen letters intended to break up marriages) and the dangerous (encouraging gang warfare and falsely labeling members of a violent group as police informers).⁴⁴

The Church Committee exposed FBI harassment of numerous domestic organizations. No part of this official investigative effort examined the history of FBI or New Mexico state police repression and violence against Alianza. In this paper, however, I have documented a pattern of state-sponsored and state-tolerated violence that targeted Alianza following its expanded influence in New Mexico and the wider civil rights movement. This examination of state violence and covert surveillance has revealed the extensive use of covert repressive practices and state-sponsored and state-tolerated violence directed at Alianza.

Alianza became a target of COINTELPRO and the New Mexico state police when it linked the history of land loss and struggle in New Mexico to the larger civil rights movement. The use of violence against Alianza reflected a racialized politics of territoriality used by the state in struggles over social and spatial control. As Alianza challenged racism and inequality, agencies of social control responded with physical violence. The FBI attacked the political effectiveness of Alianza. New Mexico state police officers bombed Alianza offices, homes and cars. The racialized coding of dissent and the conflation of dissent and “terrorism” was a general strategy of COINTELPRO. Tijerina, and other Alianzistas, became the physical embodiment of abstract categories like “terrorist” or “subversive”—categories prosaically represented by the FBI, for example, as checkboxes on circulating “Rabble Rouser Index” forms.

Extending the lessons of Alianza-state relations, the case study of Alianza and Tijerina offers useful insights into the uses of violence in the practices of state power. First, it is clear that social control requires the physical control of people within that territory. The case study of Alianza illustrates this process. As Alianza began to challenge the racial inequality underpinning the established social order, the state responded with covert action and physical violence. Tijerina became a “Rouser of the Rabble”. As an identifiable threat to the social order, Tijerina became a target in proxy for the larger Chicano movement, and therefore experienced the full measure of coercive control. Controlling Alianza required punishing Tijerina. The coding of race as a marker for “terrorist” served to keep Alianza and Tijerina within this repressive rubric.

Second, the case study reveals the political expediency and tactical effectiveness of using the *imperative of state security* in racialized terms in order to establish the conditions in which certain individuals can become targets of coercive action. Seen from the vantage point of the current War on Terror, for example, the creation of racialized subjects of state repression serves a legitimizing function for the state in pursuing extra-legal and physically violent practices such as secret detention and torture. In addition, identifying proxies or stand-ins for larger social categories serves the needs of social control agencies to identify targets for coercive action. As D’Arcus (2003) pointed out, shifting the scale of conflict from state–social group to state–“rouser of the rabble” (ie from the category to the person) minimizes the public visibility of violent state practices.

Despite this second point, general condemnation characterized the immediate response to COINTELPRO. The uproar following the Church Committee report provoked a series of legislative responses designed to prevent the state from engaging in covert repressive practices. Among these included the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) of 1978. FISA established the 11-judge Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. The law required government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to acquire a court order from the FISA court prior to conducting surveillance activities against domestic targets. In December 2005 the *New York Times* revealed that the administration of George W. Bush directed the National Security Agency to conduct warrantless domestic wiretapping activities in direct violation of FISA (Risen and Lichtblau 2005). Alongside this pattern of illegal surveillance, the Bush administration maintained a series of detention centers in secret locations abroad and sought to legitimize the use of violent interrogation techniques against “enemy combatants”. As Hannah (2006:622) described, similar to FBI arguments regarding COINTELPRO, “the entire network of extraterritorial war prisons, secret renderings, and interrogations are justified precisely as a defense of freedom and democracy against terrorism”.

The coercive strategies and racialized subjects of the War on Terror echo the campaign against Alianza. The FBI and New Mexico law enforcement agencies placed impossible political pressure and perpetrated, sponsored or tolerated physical violence against Alianza members. As the case study of Alianza, and the current War on Terror reveals, the use of violence by the state becomes an acceptable practice only when the historically specific conditions from which conflict and unrest emerge are stripped of their social context and become explained instead through abstract, racialized categories that represent a generalized threat.

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Endnotes

¹ Chicano activists adopted the term “Aztlán” to describe the American Southwest as the original homeland of La Raza.

² 28 August 1964 memo from J. Edgar Hoover to all SACs. Senate report. “The development of FBI intelligence investigations” (p 479). Church Committee Archive.

³ 26 April 1976 Report of the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. Book II, Final report, Section 3 (a)(i). “Covert action and the use of illegal or improper means”. Church Committee Archive.

⁴ 9 May 1968 memo from Charles Brennan, FBI to William Sullivan, Assistant Director of Domestic Intelligence Division, FBI. Church Committee Archive.

⁵ 15 September 1969 memo from San Diego Field Office to J. Edgar Hoover. Senate report. “Using covert action to disrupt and discredit domestic groups”. Subheading (d)(b). Church Committee Archive.

⁶ 4 August 1967 memo from Hoover to all SACs. “The development of FBI intelligence investigations” (p 511). Church Committee Archive.

⁷ Final report, Church Committee. “The development of FBI intelligence investigations” (p 513). Church Committee Archive.

⁸ Final report, Church Committee. “COINTELPRO: The FBI’s covert action programs against American citizens”, (II)(B)(8). Church Committee Archive.

⁹ 24 October 1968 memo from Hoover to all SACs. Final report, Church Committee. “The growth of domestic intelligence, 1936 to 1976”. Church Committee Archive.

¹⁰ Final report, Church Committee. “The development of FBI intelligence investigations” (p 518). Church Committee Archive.

¹¹ Final report, Church Committee. “The development of FBI intelligence investigations” (p 512). Church Committee Archive.

¹² 17 January 1968 memo from Hoover to SAC Albuquerque. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 22.

¹³ 18 February 1968 speech by Tijerina at a Black Panther Party rally in Oakland, California. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 1.

¹⁴ Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 13.

¹⁵ 16 June 1964 memo from Albuquerque SAC to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 13. FBI documents reveal that undercover agents attended every annual *Alianza* convention.

¹⁶ 12 February 1964 memorandum from Hoover to Albuquerque SAC. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 13.

¹⁷ Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 13.

¹⁸ 10 April 1964 memo from Hoover to Albuquerque SAC. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 13.

¹⁹ 20 May 1964 memo from Hoover to Albuquerque SAC. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 13.

²⁰ 16 November 1964 memo from SAC Albuquerque to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 15.

- ²¹ 20 October 1966 “Domestic intelligence division: informative note”. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 15.
- ²² 1 September 1967 memo from SAC Albuquerque to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 15.
- ²³ 6 June 1967 memorandum from Hoover to Albuquerque SAC. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 15. See also Nabokov (1969) for a description of the events immediately preceding the TA Raid and for a review of local politics and law enforcement responses, see the Governor David Cargo Papers, New Mexico State Records and Archives, Santa Fe New Mexico. Boxes 34, 58, 59.
- ²⁴ 3 November 1967 memo from Hoover to SAC Albuquerque. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 22.
- ²⁵ Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 22.
- ²⁶ Note that, on the form, Tijerina is identified as LA—Latin American, apparently a category of concern to the FBI.
- ²⁷ July 1969 *Alianza* press release. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 2.
- ²⁸ Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 4.
- ²⁹ June 1968 Draft proposal. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 34, folder 34.
- ³⁰ 27 October 1967 memo from SAC El Paso to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 23.
- ³¹ 26 April 1968 memo from SAC Albuquerque to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 1. In his memoirs, Tijerina (2000) described sleeping in the weeds outside his house to avoid getting arrested by police in the middle of the night.
- ³² Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 2.
- ³³ Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 22.
- ³⁴ 15 November 1967 memo from Hoover to SAC Albuquerque. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 22.
- ³⁵ 24 January 1969 memo from SAC Albuquerque to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 17.
- ³⁶ History of the Forest Service Archive, CSWR. Box 6, folder 3.
- ³⁷ 17 March 1969 memo from SAC Albuquerque to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 17.
- ³⁸ 16 May 1969 memo from SAC Albuquerque to Hoover. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 3, folder 17.
- ³⁹ 11 March 1968 intelligence report from Gilliland to Black. Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 35, folder 11.
- ⁴⁰ Reies Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 35, folder 11.
- ⁴¹ 28 August 1978 memo from Alianza Vice President Wilfredo Sedillo, “Tijerina’s children—political prisoners terrorized by the F.B.I”. Reies Lopez Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 5. See also Tijerina (2000:174–175).
- ⁴² Reies Lopez Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 5.
- ⁴³ 22 April 1982 press release authored by Reies Lopez Tijerina. Reies Lopez Tijerina Papers, CSWR. Box 2, folder 5.
- ⁴⁴ Final report, Church Committee. “The FBI’s covert action programs against American citizens”. Book III. Church Committee Archive.

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